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SUBJECT: MUSLIM COMMUNITIES STRUGGLE TO INTEGRATE IN SWEDEN

REF: A. STOCKHOLM 779

[1](#)B. STOCKHOLM 597

[1](#)C. STOCKHOLM 327

[1](#)D. 2008 STOCKHOLM 802

[1](#)E. 2008 STOCKHOLM 716

[1](#)F. 2008 STOCKHOLM 557

[1](#)G. 2007 STOCKHOLM 1448

Classified By: DCM Robert Silverman for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Approximately 30% or 400,000 of Sweden's foreign-born population comes from a Muslim-majority country.

Despite generous government-sponsored social services for newcomers, immigrants routinely face racial, ethnic and religious discrimination. Immigrants often live in segregated communities outside major urban areas and report difficulties finding full-time employment. For undocumented immigrants, access to healthcare is economically prohibitive, and inequalities in educational achievements for non-Swedish children exist.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Swedish civic life accommodates -- albeit to varying degrees -- Muslim religious practices such as Islamic burial, halal slaughter, the hajib and some Muslim women's requests for more modest social inclusion. As Sweden gears up for a national election next fall, immigrant integration policy -- both the challenges and opportunities -- will feature prominently in domestic political debates. Early polls show enough support for the Sweden Democrats, a far right-wing political party advocating an anti-immigrant, anti-Islam agenda, to take seats in parliament.

[1](#)3. (SBU) This is the second in a three-part series on Muslim communities in Sweden. The first part outlines growth and diversity in Muslim communities (ref A). The third part addresses violent radicalization and extremism, particularly among immigrant groups who may be alienated from mainstream Swedish society. End summary.

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THE STRUGGLE TO INTEGRATE  
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[1](#)4. (C) Like other countries in Western Europe, Sweden is home to a growing number of individuals from foreign countries. Approximately 30% or 400,000 of Sweden's foreign-born population come from Muslim-majority countries (ref A). In 2008, the Swedish Migration Board (SMB) reported that 90,000 immigrants arrived in Sweden, with largest groups from Iraq and Somalia. According Liv Feijen (protect), UNHCR's Head of the Protection Unit in the regional office for Baltic and Nordic countries, Sweden continues to attract vulnerable refugee populations, such as minors, political refugees, religious minority groups as well as a small group of gay and bisexual individuals (ref B).

[1](#)5. (SBU) Asylum seekers in particular may remain isolated from mainstream society as they await a formal decision on their residency status. The SMB aims to make asylum

decisions in about six months, but the actual waiting times can be much longer during which asylum seekers stay either with family members or at official Swedish "reception centers." They receive healthcare subsidies, a daily allowance (about \$10/day), access to Swedish language courses and children can go to school. For those granted residency, locally-funded two-year integration programs introduce individuals to the rules and regulations of Swedish life.

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HOUSING AND URBAN SEGREGATION  
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¶6. (SBU) While the 400,000 Muslim-majority immigrants to Sweden face integration difficulties, these may have less to do with Islam and more to do with the social and economic conditions of immigrant communities in general. Between 1967-1972, the government of Sweden launched the "Million Homes Program," a subsidized housing project designed to create one million modern dwellings. These apartment buildings, located in the suburbs of major urban centers, represent isolation and alienation from Swedish society for the many immigrants who live there. Today, the three largest cities in Sweden -- Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmo -- receive the largest share of the country's new immigrants.

¶7. (SBU) Stockholm metro area (pop. 1,500,000) is recognized as the center for Muslim organization in Sweden and is home to the Grand Mosque as well as three smaller mosques and several Islamic cultural organizations. Muslims tend to live on the outskirts of town in the immigrant dense neighborhoods

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of Rinkeby-Kista, Skarholmen and Spanga-Tensta where most residents claim a Middle Eastern or African background. Compared to more affluent areas in Stockholm, these districts are marked by higher unemployment and increased reliance on social support services; many school-aged children do not speak Swedish at home, and 30% the population is under 20 years of age compared to 20% in other parts of town.

¶8. (SBU) Gothenburg (pop. 500,000) is situated on the southwest coast of Sweden. About one-fifth of the residents are born outside of Sweden. In 2008, 8,000 foreign individuals settled in Gothenburg with the five largest groups coming from Iraq, Romania, Poland, Somalia and Iran. In 1998, a nightclub fire attended by teenagers with immigrant backgrounds claimed the lives of 63 young people and injured 213 more. Police and fire investigators eventually determined that the blaze was intentionally set by four young immigrants from Iran who were upset at being denied entry to the event. More than ten years after the fire, this tragedy continues to symbolize the complex racial tensions that persist in Gothenburg and other urban areas.

¶9. (SBU) Malmo (pop. 286,535) is located on the southern tip of Sweden about 30 minutes from Copenhagen, Denmark. This area between Sweden and Denmark, known as the "Oresund region," encompasses over 3 million people. Malmo has a long history as an immigrant destination for people from South America, Turkey and the Balkans, although the largest non-Swedish group living in Malmo are Danes. A government report shows that immigrants from non-EU countries usually only reside in Malmo for about five years before they move to other places in Sweden, which makes the population very transient. About a quarter of Malmo's residents are Muslim (ref C). In the immigrant-dense district of Rosengard, recent violent encounters between law enforcement officers and youth have resulted in emergency workers and fire department officials refusing to enter the district. Malmo is considered to be one of Sweden's most ethnically segregated cities.

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UNEMPLOYMENT  
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¶10. (SBU) The current center-right government views employment as a key indicator of successful immigrant integration, but trends show that immigrants have struggled to achieve employment at the same levels as native-born Swedes. In 2005, the employment rate among individuals born in Sweden was 81% compared to 64% among individuals born outside of Sweden. In some Muslim-majority communities such as Rosengard in Malmo, employment is estimated at just 38%. Swedish officials often state with concern that male immigrants to Sweden will search for employment on average for seven years before finding a permanent job. For females immigrants, it takes about ten years. Economists at Stockholm University found that immigrants may have better luck on the Swedish job market if they change their surname from an African, Asian or Slavic sounding name to a more Swedish or neutral sounding name, which underscores the indirect and institutionalized discrimination that immigrants routinely face in the Swedish labor market.

¶11. (SBU) The Ministry for Integration and Gender Equality presented a new government bill on September 11, 2009 that, if passed, will allocate some \$133 million to reforming the employment process. Working with the Swedish Employment Agency, immigrants will be given a "coach" to help tailor an individualized two-year program that will include language and civic training. Financial incentives will be given to those actively pursuing employment. Minister for Integration and Gender Equality Nyamko Sabuni stated that the plan is intended to move immigrants from welfare dependency and social exclusion to self-sufficiency and empowerment. Critics argue that the proposed changes do not do enough to encourage companies in Sweden to hire immigrant labor.

¶12. (SBU) Two new government-supported initiatives aim to address these employment hurdles for immigrants. Manpower, a world leader in employment services, has developed a public-private initiative with the city of Sodertalje, home to a large Iraqi community, to support immigrant entry into the workforce through job preparation training and arranging practical working internships. The "Kosmopolit Project," launched by the MFA on September 15, aims to establish networks where foreign-born entrepreneurs can meet, exchange experience and support each other. According to the MFA, one in five companies set up in Sweden is started by a person with a foreign background.

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#### HEALTH AND EDUCATION

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¶13. (SBU) Numerous academic studies show that immigrants to Sweden suffer from chronic and stress-related illnesses more so than native-born Swedes. Immigrant women's health issues including domestic violence and trauma have received special government attention through telephone-based support programs that offer help in at least 43 different languages. These programs also offer assistance to women at risk for honor crimes. The Red Cross and other volunteer organizations operate a network of no-cost healthcare services for undocumented immigrants in Sweden, including those who have been denied asylum. The Red Cross estimates that 10,000 to 15,000 undocumented people reside in Sweden, of which 1,000 to 1,500 are children. Undocumented individuals fear being arrested if they seek medical care through the nationalized medical system and say that costs are prohibitive for those outside the Swedish system. One report found that undocumented immigrants pay \$700 per doctor visit compared to just \$36 that Swedish citizens pay for the same services.

¶14. (SBU) Immigrant children typically perform substantially worse than native students in the Swedish educational system, according to a new study by the Swedish Institute for Labor

Market Policy Analysis. The study found that educational inequalities are more severe the older a child is at the time of migration; those who arrive in Sweden after age 7 face more social and economic difficulties later in life than those who arrive before the age of 7. According to Statistics Sweden, foreign-born individuals have only a somewhat lower level of education compared to individuals born in Sweden, with 37% of Swedes and 35% of all immigrants having post-secondary education. Some immigrant groups, notably Iranians, have attained a higher level of education than Swedes.

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HATE CRIMES AND ISLAMOPHOBIA  
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¶15. (SBU) According to the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, there were almost 6,000 hate crimes reported in Sweden in 2008. This figure, up dramatically from previous years, reflects a new definition of "hate crime," which adopts a broader view of what constitutes hate crimes. An overwhelming majority of hate crimes (72%) were based on racial and/or ethnic harassment. Of the total reported hate crimes in 2008, 21% included direct physical contact or violence while the remaining 79% involved nonviolent threats.

¶16. (SBU) Most hate crimes occurred in public places between individuals who did not know each other prior to the reported incidents. Included within the hate crime figures were 600 hate crimes against religious groups, of which 45% involved Islamophobia and 26% involved anti-Semitism. In response to these crimes involving religion, the Swedish government established an anonymous hotline for reporting harassment and created one specially-trained police unit in Stockholm to respond to hate crimes. Outreach in schools and information pamphlets have been produced in a number of languages to make sure more people know that they can report hate crimes.

¶17. (SBU) Anti-immigrant rhetoric has gained some traction in political campaigning by the Sweden Democrats, a far-right political group that claims some 3,600 members. Sweden Democrats promote a nationalist agenda and view immigration, Islamization and globalization as threats to Swedish culture. In September 2009, voter opinion polls showed that the Sweden Democrats received support from 5.9% of the Swedish population, a number which exceeds the 4% threshold for entry into the Swedish Parliament. In the last general election in 2006, Sweden Democrats received 2.9% support. Following the Swiss minaret referendum this fall, Jimmie Akesson, leader of the Sweden Democrats, spoke in support of the referendum saying, "Minarets are a symbol of the multiculturalism and Islamization of Europe." White supremacy groups are also on the rise, according to a study by the Expo Foundation. There were 39 Swedish white power groups in 2008, of which 25 had been created between 2007-2008.

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MUSLIMS IN SWEDISH LIFE  
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¶18. (SBU) In spite of integration struggles, Swedish civic life accommodates many Muslim religious and social practices. Burial according to Islamic tradition has been available in Swedish cemeteries since 1974. Muslim graveyards can now be found in all major Swedish cities and a growing number of

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smaller cities. Halal slaughter is not officially permitted in Sweden, but halal meat can be imported. The hijab is a relatively common sight in Swedish life, although recent controversy erupted over adult students who requested to wear the full-cover niqab while attending a teacher-training program; school officials said that the clothing hindered student-teacher interaction. Public debate about Muslim women who decline to shake hands with members of the opposite

sex has resulted in numerous discussions about cultural and religious practices (ref D). Separate swim hours for men and women have been arranged at a few public pools, a move which has received surprising support from Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

¶19. (SBU) More generally, political debate has focused on where immigrants and asylum seekers settle; many choose to live with family and friends in large cities when they arrive in Sweden, causing financial burdens for local governments and creating ghetto-like living conditions in some areas. Several programs in larger cities such as Malmo recruit newly-arrived immigrants to be re-settled in less densely populated areas, which Malmo city officials say has found some success. In addition, officials at the MFA's Ministry for Integration and Gender Equality are also working to develop a set of common values in support of equality and tolerance in Swedish life to serve as a touchstone for integration in Swedish society.

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Anti-Ethnic Profiling  
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¶20. (C) Many Swedish officials admit that integration policies have largely failed, but at the same time, there is an overall hesitancy to engage Muslim communities directly because Swedish law strictly prohibits targeting individuals on the basis of religious and ethnic affiliation. However, U.S.-supported programs such as education and employment fairs as well as programs for international visitors and immigrant entrepreneurship have met with interest and remain fruitful areas for continued bilateral outreach (ref E, F, G).  
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